

THE CUP AND THE FIRE

by

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Chapter One

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE CUP AND THE SCATTERED FIRE

Reading: Mark 10:35-39; Matthew 26:27-28, 39, 42; Luke 22:20; John 18:11; 1 Corinthians 10:16; 11:26.

I came to cast fire upon the earth; and would that it were already kindled! But I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished! (Luke 12:49-50; RSV; KJV)

With the passages that we have read fresh in our minds, I think that we are able to see that this last passage gathers them all into itself, and that what they all bring before us is the relationship between the cup of the Lord and the scattering of the fire in the earth. The Lord joined these two things together, and showed their relationship; indicating that the scattering of the fire in the earth was dependent upon the drinking of the cup. And in so doing, He only indicated and established a law, a law which history has demonstrated and proved - either negatively or positively - so deeply, so mightily. Where there has been no cup there has been no fire: where there has been the cup, there has always been the fire. It is the story of all the persecutions, all the sufferings of the people of God, which have issued in the progress of the Gospel. It is something that we have to recognize very clearly and to accept quite definitely, that, right at the very heart of everything in the purpose of God, there is a cup; and only by the drinking of that cup is any kind of real spiritual progress, enlargement, possible. But, to put that in another way, the drinking of that cup will always issue in spiritual progress or increase or enlargement or deepening. It is always gain.

An Apparent Contradiction

Now here we have to pause to clear up the difficulty that is always present to confuse our minds in this matter, a fundamental conflict or confusion. On the one side, the Christian life ought to be characterized by joy, by peace, by rest, by hope, by life. On the other side, the same Christian life - without any contradiction to that - not only can be, but should be, characterized by suffering. The Lord Jesus mingled those two things in the moment when He took the cup. "He took the cup, and gave thanks" - He *gave thanks*. There should be, I say, no contradiction between these two things: joy and sorrow mingled; rest and peace and hope in the very presence of suffering, adversity and affliction.

If we do not clear up this matter in our minds we are going to get into difficulty. We are going to argue that the Christian life ought to be one continuous, unbroken song, joyfulness and exuberance, enthusiasm and lightheartedness, with no 'wrong' or sombre elements whatever. If you think like that, you have misread your New Testament! On the other hand, it is possible for us to regard the sufferings and the trials, the difficulties and adversities, as the marks of a kind of holy Christian life, which must exclude anything exuberant and joyful and glad. Some people nurse that kind of complex: they are afraid of joy; they are afraid even of spiritual laughter!

We have to recognize that we are not speaking about natural things now. There is that sublime, that wonderful, that Divine paradox - "sorrowful, yet always rejoicing" (2 Corinthians 6:10), in the midst of afflictions and trials; "in manifold trials", Peter says, yet "rejoicing with joy unspeakable and full of glory" (1 Peter 1:6-8). Somehow that has got to be recognized, or we shall be in trouble. The true apprehension of the Christian life is not that of frivolity and superficiality. It

is something, as we have said, that has a cup right at the heart of it. The true apprehension of the cup is not something morbid, something morose; is not eternal sadness.

The peril of having a contradiction in the back of our minds in this matter is far more real than perhaps we recognize. Suppose we are meeting those who are having a very good time. They are in one of those phases of the Christian life where all is good - it is spring-time, or it is summer-time - there are no clouds in their sky, and they are inclined to 'down' the person who is having a bad time, perhaps passing through some temporary darkness or eclipse, and to feel that there is something wrong with their Christianity. On the other side, if it is we who are having the difficult time, let us be very, very patient with those who are not. Let us reconcile these things and see that they may only represent two aspects of one thing and not be contradictory at all.

The Cup of the Lord

We all know that the cup of the Lord is central and basic to the life of the Church, and to our lives as Christians. It represents the very centre, the very focal point, both of the Church's life and of the believer's life. That is where the Word of God puts it, that is the place that the Scriptures give to it: it is the gathering centre of the people of God, the foundation of their life individually and collectively. But there is, so to speak, a division in the cup, which we must recognize immediately: that is, there is His side and there is ours. Let us get this cleared up before we go further.

There is the side of the Lord Jesus in that cup, with which we have nothing to do, so far as the drinking of it is concerned. It is uniquely His; it is His alone. It has to do, as we know, with our redemption. It has to do with our sin, it has to do with our judgment under the wrath of God; it has to do with the final outworking of sin and judgment, it has to do with death. And it has to do with the remission of sins: 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for the remission of sins' (Matthew 26:28; Luke 22:20). It has to do with our justification before God, our setting in the position of the Righteous One; it has to do with our very life - "the eternal life" (1 John 1:2). In all that, you and I have no part, except to receive it by faith. In drinking the cup we do not, of course, work out our redemption, or have any part or place in that great atoning, substitutionary, representative work for us: that is isolated to Him. No one can go that path with the Lord in His sufferings; that is His path. Our sufferings with the Lord are not vicarious as His were.

But then there is *our* path. We are brought in to share the cup, but our part is in another realm. It is that of sharing His reproach. It is because we are standing with Him for His rights which are being disputed and challenged and terribly fought against in this universe and in this world; it is because the Holy Spirit is doing something in us in relation to the character of the Lord Jesus. You know very well that, no sooner is there the slightest sign of any Christ-likeness in an individual, than something seems to be provoked: and antagonism breaks out, which says, in effect, 'You must not be like Christ!' Unseen forces 'take knowledge that we have been with Jesus', and they counsel to put us to death.

It is something, you see, in the spiritual realm which hates this character of Jesus, because its presence is an exposure and a condemnation of sin. Evil hates good and cannot bear its presence - the very presence of good causes misery and suffering. And it is in that, just in being Christlike, that we are involved in His cup. It is because we have taken sides with Him against a great enemy, His age-long, sworn enemy, who, with all his vicious malignity, is determined that the last

semblance and trace of this One shall be blotted out, if he can do it! You and I are intended to be present here in this world as a semblance of Christ, and we come under those evil counsels. That is our part. We are partners with Him in His position in this world, and that involves the drinking of His cup, the cup of suffering.

That is where we begin with the cup. It is there as our ground: the ground of our salvation, of our redemption, our justification, our life. We stand on that ground. We take the cup gratefully and with thanksgiving. But, in doing so, we commit ourselves to this side of the cup. We become involved in this side of His sufferings, and there is no evading, or avoiding, or getting away from it. This is something to be clearly recognized and definitely and deliberately accepted, right at the outset, and to be kept continually in mind.

The Cup Marks A Separation

But then there are other things about the cup. This cup sets forth and represents the absolute holiness and apartness of Christ, and of all that is related to Christ. You remember 1 Corinthians 10: 'You cannot drink of the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons' (verse 21); you cannot bring these together. It betokens a failure to recognize the utter apartness of two whole realms. This cup speaks of that apartness, that holiness, that separateness of Christ and all that is Christ's. It marks the difference, the fundamental and radical difference, between the Christian and everyone else.

That is the whole argument of the first letter to the Corinthians. Throughout that letter we have an unlawful bringing together of things, focused in that unlawful bringing together at the Lord's Table. It is a terrible letter, which really does centre in this matter of the cup. What the Apostle is doing is seeking to point out that there is a discrimination that must be exercised, a difference that must be discerned. It is a question, not of degrees of Christian life, but of the very basis and nature of the Christian life - that a Christian is *this*, and not that. These things are separated by the cup. The cup is something very holy, something very separate, something very different; and if you and I drink the cup, we are supposed to be different from everyone else, that is, from everyone who is not the Lord's. There is a character required by this cup, a character that is different; there is a life that is different, there is a person that is different. The cup declares that. It challenges everything that does not belong to Christ: it stands against that, because that is against the cup. This is a holy thing.

No wonder the Apostle was so strong on this matter - and no wonder that distressing and tragic things were happening in Corinth! "For this cause many among you are weak and sickly, and not a few sleep" (verse 30) - through not discriminating at the Lord's Table. It is searching.

But note again, this cup deals with and removes all the ground of Satan. Satan's ground, of course, is the ground of nature: your nature and mine - what we are in ourselves. That is the playground of Satan. The cup deals with that and takes Satan's ground from him; it puts him out. That is why Judas had to go: the cup drove him out. The very significance of the cup meant that he was not of it: he was of another; he must go. He is Satan's ground in the holy circle, and he must be eliminated.

The Unifying Work of the Cup

But then again, the cup is the great unifying factor for the Lord's own. It is in the first place the great means of unification with Himself, for it is our common

participation with Him. The cup links us with Him. It not only distinguishes us as His, as different, but it declares a relationship which is - to use the symbolism - most truly a blood-relationship. In the second place, it establishes a relationship of that kind between all who are joined to the Lord. The cup is that which unifies His own.

These may sound simple things, but they are profoundly challenging. Let us look again at this first letter to the Corinthians, chapter 10, verse 16: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a communion of (eg. a participation in) the blood of Christ?" Now look just over the next chapter (of course it is a continuous narrative in the original letter). We come to this: "First of all, when ye come together in the church" (or: "in assembly"), "I hear that divisions exist among you; and I partly believe it" (11:18). You see the contradiction? It is not just that we participate with Christ, but together we are on common ground in our participation: it is collective, it is corporate - a *common* participation, a *together* participation, a *one* participation. It is the Church. 'Now when you come together as the Church, there are divisions among you' - that is a contradiction, it is a violation of the very meaning of that cup.

You know, when you go back to the beginning of that letter the Apostle has much more to say about this matter of divisions. He so early opens up the matter of divisions (1:10-13). 'There are contentions among you: one says, I am of Paul' (you can put what name you like there), 'and I am of Apollos, and I am of Cephas.' It represents parties, does it not? Parties in the Church. The point is this, that the Apostle is steadily working his way towards the matter of the Table, and he makes that the climax. He is saying, in effect: 'You cannot have the Table in reality while it is like that - the reality of the Table is impossible - the *reality* of it - while it is like that! It is a contradiction, it is a denial, it is a mockery; it is the fundamental subverting of the very meaning of the cup, if it is like that. You cannot have it in reality - but you can have it to your own undoing and judgment.'

You see, this cup, the cup of the Lord, above all things speaks of *love* - the love of the Father, the love of the Son, the love of the Spirit, and the mutual love of believers.

The Cup Needed for the Fire

" I have a baptism to be baptized with..." "Are ye able to drink the cup that I drink? or to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" (Mark 10:33). What the Lord was really saying, in other words, was this: 'I have a cup to drink; and, until I have drunk it, that very purpose for which I have come is in suspense. I have come to scatter fire into the earth.' The two things go together.

We shall perhaps see later the fire scattered. You see, we are all very interested in the scattering of the fire - put that how you will: if you like, the progress of the Gospel, the extension of the Kingdom, the salvation of souls, the expansion of testimony. It is all the same thing; it is the scattering of the fire. The earth has got to feel the touch of something from Christ - to register something burning, something living, something consuming, something against which it cannot stand. 'I am come to scatter fire in the earth.'

But note - that is all dependent upon the cup, from first to last, and upon all that the cup implies. You notice that 2 Corinthians entirely rests upon those two things. "For as the sufferings of Christ abound unto us..." (1:5): there is the cup. "Therefore seeing we have this ministry..." (4:1): the ministry rests upon the cup. This second letter is, as you know, the letter of the ministry, but notice that

it begins with the sufferings of Christ *abounding* unto us. The scattering of the fire, the fulfilment of the ministry, the service of the Lord, the expansion of the Gospel - however we may put it - rests upon the cup: and not merely upon the cup as for our salvation, but the cup in all those other aspects of a holy life, of an inward separateness, of something apart for the Lord.

And it rests upon, not only our oneness with Him, but our oneness *in* Him. Souls will not be saved while there is disruption in the instrument; souls will not be saved while there are divisions amongst those who are seeking their salvation. The work will not grow and expand and enlarge if Satan is allowed a place to divide the people of God. Christ Himself has pointed to the established law; we cannot get away from it. We may try, make our efforts, do all that we can, but they are just not getting there. What is the matter? The matter is, that there is sin somewhere, or there is division somewhere. There is some circling around people, or making parties; and we are simply destroying our own work if it is like that.

You see, this is *corporate* - it is the *Church* that the Apostle is talking about and writing to. He is speaking about the Church again and again in these Corinthian letters. 'When you come together as the assembly, as the Church...' This fellowship in the cup, for the scattering of the fire, is a corporate matter.

We need to ask ourselves: Have we a right to have the table, to have the cup? Have we the ground for this? We have got to get our basis, our foundation right, before we can have anything else. It would be lovely to go on with the scattering of the fire, to see the thing working out on the side of the glory and the power. Yes, we would like to be caught up in that; but we have got to get our basis right, and the basis is the cup.

There is no doubt that the ruin of the Church's testimony and ministry is so often resultant from either or both of these two things: either a contradiction to the cup right in its midst, or else an avoidance of the cup - trying not to face the cup and accept the involvement in the sufferings. We will have a good time, and make everything like that; but the cup - no. The ruination of testimony and ministry comes as much by avoiding the cup as by contradicting it. But the cup is there: you cannot move it. It is established in all its meaning; it has to be taken.

I think those two disciples were a little frivolous. How profoundly and terribly right the Lord was when He said: 'You know not what you ask.' 'We are able,' they said 'Very well, you shall.' The first one of those was the prototype martyr of the New Testament. We shall think about him perhaps later. He drank the cup. Herod killed James with the sword. 'You shall... you shall...' This is something very real. Nevertheless, we shall see that it worked out for the furtherance of the Gospel.

If our attitude to the cup is right, the other will follow. It will follow quite naturally, quite spontaneously. The cup leads to the scattered fire; the scattered fire waits for the cup. 'He took the cup and gave it to them and said...Take... drink... drink ye all of it.'

Let us ask the Lord just how this word applies, where it applies, what it means. May He give us grace to receive it!

Chapter Two

THE CONFLICT OF THE AGES

Reading: Acts 12.

I came to cast fire upon the earth; and would that it were already kindled! But I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished! (Luke 12:49-50)

In our first message we were mainly occupied with the cup and its consequence in the scattering of the fire, with a view to taking fresh account of the relationship between those two things: that there is no scattering of the fire, and all that that means of the progress of the Gospel and the growth of the Church, except in so far as the meaning of the cup is established as the foundation of everything, right at the very heart of the life of the people of God.

We are now going to look at the twelfth chapter of the book of the Acts, for this chapter is a microcosm of the history of the cup and the fire. That, of course, is true of the whole of this book: it is the cup, undoubtedly - the Church in suffering relationship with the Lord. But it is also the book of the scattered fire. This chapter, as I have said, is a miniature of that whole great truth; indeed, it is a miniature of the struggle of the ages between the powers of evil and the invincible spiritual forces which eventually triumph. The tremendous amount of history and truth packed into this chapter never fails to move and stir us when we read it. I wonder whether there is a chapter in the Bible so pregnant with phrases and clauses, piled one upon another, every one of which could, without exaggeration, occupy our whole chapter.

Take some of these clauses, only a few of the many: "Now about that time..." What a key that is, and what a lot that key opens if you stay with it! We shall probably make use of it presently. "Herod the king..." There is far more in that than you recognize. "To vex certain of the church..." The vexation of the Church or the attempted vexation of the Church. "Killed James..." We pointed out previously that it was this James and John who came to the Lord requesting places on the right hand and on the left in glory, to whom the Lord immediately uttered the challenge: 'Are you able to drink of the cup that I drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism wherewith I am baptized?' And they said: 'We are able.' 'You shall...' "And he killed James with the sword..." "When he saw that it pleased the Jews..." *'It pleased the Jews!'* There is a lot in that. "He proceeded further..." And so we might go on. The whole chapter is full of phrases and clauses like that which are just packed with meaning.

Let us look at the message of this chapter. "Now about that time..." About what time? It is full of significance to put your finger on that and note the time. The answer is a very large one, but it has two main features. There is the answer lying within Herod himself, and there is the answer which lies behind Herod, much more deeply - the answer of Satan. Let us consider the answer in Herod.

"Herod the king" (verse 1). There were six Herods in the Bible. All of them were Idumaeans in origin: they are gathered under that symbolic name of 'Edom'. That is, they were descendants of Esau, not of Israel. All that is very significant. This man before us was the first and the last of them properly to hold this title of 'king'. None of them up to him had officially held that title, and after he died the title of 'king' was taken away.

We are witnessing here the heading up of a long history. The prophecies of Obadiah should be read in order really to get the substance of this - this historic antagonism between the flesh and the Spirit, between heaven and hell, between Esau and Israel. There is a long history here, headed right up to this man who now takes the title of 'king'. What irony that the Jews should come to be ruled by a descendant of Esau and not of Israel, and that that ruler should be appointed by pagan Rome! It is something to think about. We are in the presence of a tremendous drama here, profoundly fascinating - but oh, how deeply instructive!

" About that time Herod the king put forth his hands to afflict certain of the church... And when he saw that it pleased the Jews..." (verses 1,3). Now why should Herod do this Jew-pleasing thing at that time? It might look just like a human story, it might seem to be something very simple, but we are in the unfolding of this much deeper thing. Satan, as we know, is very deep, but God is deeper still, and that is what is happening here. If you look back to the chapter before this, you will find that there was a great famine. "Now in these days there came down prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch. And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit that there should be a great famine over all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius... Now about that time..." (Acts 11:27-28; 12:1).

The simple answer is this: the Jews were a very difficult people to rule. That is perfectly clear, of course; we know that. But add to the normal, usual, common difficulty a famine. You know there is nothing that leads to revolution more quickly than famine and hunger. We are told later in the story that the people of Tyre and Sidon, in Phoenicia, were fed from King Herod's province (verse 20). It is a question of food, and it has become very acute. There is a seething and surging and a rising, and Herod must do something to get these people diverted from their troubles, get them preoccupied. Something must be done for them; there must be some diversion. He cannot provide the food and avoid the famine; it has come, it is a fact. Then, if he is going to maintain his position and hold these people and keep them in check, he must do something to please them. And there is your answer!

It sounds like a human story, a bit of trickery, politics, or whatever you like to call it; but that is one part of the answer. "Now about that time..." Why must he please the Jews? Well, that is the answer. How will he please the Jews? He knows their hatred for the Christians - that is a long story, too - and so he will "put forth his hands to afflict certain of the church." The Christians were being used to buttress up this ramshackle, false kingdom of Herod, to keep his throne intact. He is using them for his own ends. Well, that is only part of the answer - Herod's part. It is a very simple one.

But let us get behind Herod, because Herod is not acting alone. There is something more, something deeper. The deeper and the more real answer to the question is found in the satanic realm behind the man. Let us look at chapter 11 again, verse 19: "*They therefore that were scattered abroad upon the tribulation that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phoenicia, and Cyprus, and Antioch, speaking the word to none save only to Jews.*"

" They... that were scattered abroad upon the tribulation that arose about Stephen..." That is a profoundly inclusive word. There is something happening. Oh, what a lot has been happening! That takes us back to chapter seven - the martyrdom of Stephen. Stephen is stoned; that is the cup. It looks like an immense triumph for the devil. Stephen was a mighty man of the Spirit; there were tremendous hopes for the Church bound up with the life of that young man. Some have said, after reading his discourse and studying it, that he was the

equal of Saul of Tarsus at least. And there he is, murdered. It looks as though Satan has really triumphed.

But what after that? From that very point there was a scattering of the believers far and wide, and they went everywhere, testifying. Saul of Tarsus is converted, and what a tremendous thing that is! Peter is led to the house of Cornelius, away up there in the north; and we know what happened there - the door is opened to the Gentiles. Things of the greatest significance are coming out of the cup, the cup of the Lord; out of the baptism and passion into which the Church has been baptized. Believers were constantly added to the Church (9:31, 42; 11:21, 34). The thing is growing. The fire is spreading; Satan's kingdom is being shaken. The kingdom of Satan is being stirred to its depths, and something must be done about it.

Someone tersely put it: 'The men that have turned the world upside down have come hither' (17:6). "Now about *that* time Herod the king..." You see? That is the explanation. Out of this baptism of the passion of the Lord into which the Church has been brought, the fire is spreading; but the enemy is moved - deeply moved. Herod 'puts forth his hand' - and there is a hand behind that hand - "to afflict certain of the church. And he killed James... with the sword. And when he saw that it pleased the Jews..." he proceeded further. I would like to stay with all those fragments, because there is a message in every one of them. Herod is carried on by his own momentum. Have a little success, and see what it will do for you!

However, we turn away from that for a moment to the other side - the aspect of this that we may call a drama indeed, that of the sovereign Kingship of the Lord. It is all summed up in three things: "Herod... put forth his hands to afflict... an angel of the Lord smote him... But the word of God grew and multiplied" (12:1, 23-24). That is tremendous, is it not? We begin the story with Herod putting forth his hands; we end the story with Herod eaten of worms and giving up the ghost. You begin with the Church a victim and martyr; you end with the Word of God growing and multiplying. This is the story of another King. It is the story of two kings pitting themselves against each other. It is, as I said at the beginning, the microcosm of this long history of the conflict between the forces of evil and those invincible forces of the Spirit, which always triumph in the long run.

But here a pressing question arises. When you think of the beginning - that he killed James with the sword, and when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also - the question that clamours for an answer is: Why does God allow this kind of thing? Why did He not intervene before James was killed with the sword? Why did He not stop this thing before Peter was thrown into prison? Ah, that is another key to another large history, is it not? The mystery of God's permissive will: God allowing His servants, His so useful servants, to be killed or cast into prison; allowing the Church to suffer like this. Why does God allow it?

The answer lies deep down within the cup. If you get deep enough into the cup, you will find the answer. Let me put it the other way - it is deep within the Cross. God, in the mystery of His will and His ways, uses the Church as He used Israel, to draw out the evil forces to their own destruction. 'God moves in a mysterious way...' Is it the Church, or is it the forces against it, that are destroyed eventually? You see the answer in history. It is here in this chapter, in representation. Here you have Israel in Egypt. What a tremendous extending of Pharaoh - drawing him out, drawing him to the limit of his own resources to give an answer through the magicians, and then going on and going on, further and yet further, all Pharaoh's resources are exhausted, and then God smashes him.

The sum total of his whole resource is broken and destroyed - and God has used a suffering people to draw it all out.

That is the story here. In the mystery of God's ways the Church suffers, but its suffering comes from the enemy, whom God is drawing out by means of the Church - drawing him out and extending him. And when his cup of iniquity is full, God will smash him beyond repair. That is the issue of Herod. It is the Church that has brought this about. It is the sufferings of James and Peter and the Church in these days that have accomplished that. But is that not found right in the Cross? Look at the Cross! Is the Cross the extending of all the powers of evil in earth and in hell? It is that! When you see Him there on the Cross, dead, and know how it is brought about, and all that has gone to bring it about - the whole story of human and satanic malice and spite - you ask: Is there anything more that they can do? No! What is the answer? The scattered fire! That is the answer. It is in the cup, it is in the Cross; it is an integral part of this whole matter. The sufferings of Christ which abound unto us, unto the Church, are working Satan's undoing - and for us a 'far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory' (2 Corinthians 4:17).

Why does God allow it? Wait, if you can, in patience and in faith. "Here is the patience of the saints" (Revelation 13:10; 14:12). Do you remember that word? If you can wait, you will see that, on the one side, your suffering, or your sufferings, wrought havoc in the kingdom of Satan, brought him to an end of his power: they drew him out, they were the marks of his coming out. On the other side, the sufferings have worked glory for you. And in the meantime there has been spiritual increase, spiritual progress, scattered fire.

God uses the work of Satan for Satan's undoing. But it is the Church and it is the saints who are the instrument. It is in their soul that this battle is fought out. "Now unto the principalities and the powers in the heavenlies... made known through the church the manifold wisdom of God" (Ephesians 3:10). Something is happening in the unseen.

The progress of the Word of God is a costly thing. It involves much suffering - it involves the cup; but that is His way. Here, then, we see God using Satan's work - on the one side for Satan's own undoing and overthrow, and on the other side for the progress of the Word, for the Church's advance and for the glory of God. And that is wrapped up in this anguish of fellowship with His sufferings.

You and I have had a good deal of difficulty in understanding why Paul should long to know the fellowship of His sufferings. It is one of the most difficult prayers for us to pray, is it not? But Paul knew this secret, that that is the way of the progress of the Gospel, that is the way for the destruction of this that is set against it: the fellowship of His sufferings; for that is the heart of the Cross of the Lord Jesus Himself.

And all this is inherent in the cup. The cup ceases to be an object, it ceases to be just a thing: it becomes something living, something potent. That cup is a mighty force in this universe. When you and I come to the Lord's Table next time, may God give us some larger conception of what a tremendous thing is there, touching every realm in His universe. It is the representation of something living. This blood speaks, this blood tells, this blood counts. Blood is vital; it is a terrific force in this universe. When we take the cup, and thereby accept the baptism, the passion, let us recognize that in faith we take also the tremendous victory that it sets forth. It is costly!

Let us now see where this was all wrought out. On the one side, Herod - wicked, wicked Herod, with all the cruelty of his long history, going back to Esau; the Jews, delighted that action was being taken against the followers of Jesus; the prison, the chains, the strong guard within and without - four quaternions of soldiers. These are things that represent great forces and great difficulty - all the things which are against. They are not just words; they are tremendous things, all of them, viewed from the natural standpoint. That is on the one side. On the other side, "an angel of the Lord": and Herod, and the Jews, and the prison, and the chains, and the guard, are as nothing.

Where is it wrought out? In a prayer meeting, as it were right in between those two. Between the forces of hell and of heaven was the Church at prayer. The thing would not have happened otherwise. Those forces of evil would not have yielded to the heavenly authority of the ascended Christ through an angel, if it had not been for what was going on in that room. "But," it says, "prayer was made... of the Church..." But... But... Away all the forces! Calculate them, take their full strength and meaning, and then put one word over it all - 'But'. 'The Church prayed...' And in response to that the angel - and all the other was as nothing.

The Church at prayer. What do you think about that? It says that "prayer was made *earnestly*," but that English word does not really convey the force of it at all. The Greek word means literally 'extendedly', 'stretched out'. The Church prayed in a stretched out way; the Church was extended. Satan was extended, heaven was extended, and these two powers came into collision because the Church was extended. It will never come about in any other way; it is just like that. What a tremendous thing is wrapped up with the Church at prayer!

As I dwell upon this story, many, many thoughts that are not in the story crowd into my mind. How different it might have been if the Church, instead of getting together and focusing upon the situation in oneness and in prayer like this, had said: 'Oh, if only Stephen had not said those things! If only so-and-so had been a little more discreet... If only...!' and a thousand other things of blame: blaming one and another and holding people responsible for this and putting it down to that, and that, turning in on themselves until they had got a whole situation of questions and reproaches and recriminations, and a 'case'. And the whole thing is sabotaged! Dear brothers and sisters, whenever this kind of thing happens we must look deeper. Behind all that is the strategy of Herod to frustrate the scattering of the fire. When the devil can get us turned in on ourselves and on our own problems, and upon one another's faults and weaknesses and failures, and so on, he has defeated the whole business of the Lord. You may pray and pray and pray, but if there is the contradiction of division in the background, you pray in vain. The Lord will not come in.

They prayed as the Church in this 'stretched out' way. There is no other thing in mind; they are of one mind and heart. They are concentrated upon a satanic issue. There is a lesson in that. Oh, how our prayer is paralysed by a thousand and one things which, if we only knew the truth, are not really the trouble - they are things that Satan has got hold of. There may be faults. Was any one of the Apostles faultless? There may be weaknesses; but if only you are on the Lord's business, the Lord takes action.

It has been said concerning the disciples' disputing with Rhoda about Peter, that they had prayed and prayed and prayed all night, and then when their prayer was answered they did not believe it; and some people have said that they could not have prayed in faith. But there are other points of view. Some of us pray with all our might about a dear brother now in prison. I beg to suggest that, if someone

came to us and said: 'Brother... is at the door!' we should say: 'He can't be!' We should want a good deal of verification - not because we did not believe that the Lord could do it or would do it; but, somehow or other, when the Lord does the very thing that we ask for, our breath is taken away and we cannot believe it. Have mercy upon these believers, and do not impute unbelief. The fact is, that, though they may have prayed like that, and though there may have been faults and weaknesses, they were on the business, and they were one in it, and the Lord moved in.

How much came out of this! They saw through the whole situation and got to the real issue; they pushed aside all other considerations, and out of their travail something was born. You remember what follows after chapter twelve. In the previous chapter (11:19-30) Antioch had come into view: and now from Antioch Paul and Barnabas are sent forth, and on and on you go. The fire is scattered to the ends of the earth - out of this: *The Church prayed*.

It is a wonderful story, but I find much difficulty in seeking to convey it. It is so true to life. There is always so much room for the mystery of God's ways. Why? Why? Why? If you stay with the 'why's' of God's wisdom, you will be paralysed. Let me recall what we were saying at the beginning of our first message. Here is a law enunciated, declared, established - that there is no scattered fire without the cup, and that cup is always a mystery. It always expresses itself in ways concerning which you can say: 'Why this...?' 'Why that...?' 'Why does He allow this...?' Those 'why's' will paralyse you if you have not reached the established, settled position, that the cup has come to stay; it will be with us to the end.

But, in the mystery of suffering permitted by God, and in all that that cup means in a crucified Son of God and a crucified Church - in all that is the way of Satan's undoing and the establishment of the heavenly Kingdom. May God settle it in us, and give us grace!

Chapter Three

THE POSITIVE NATURE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

I came to cast fire upon the earth; and would that it were already kindled! But I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished! (Luke 12:49-50)

Being assembled together with them, he charged them not to depart from Jerusalem but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, said he, ye heard from me: for John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence (Acts 1:4-5).

"Wait for the promise of the Father... not many days hence." The thought that I want to pass on to you concerns the *positive* nature of the Holy Spirit. We know that the Holy Spirit is the answer to the words of the Lord Jesus: "I came to scatter fire" . The baptism of the Holy Spirit was a baptism of fire. Now fire is always positive; and if the Holy Spirit corresponds to the fire, it means that the Holy Spirit is also positive. Fire is neither cold nor neutral: fire is positive. When you touch it, or when it touches you, or when you get near it, you know that you are in the presence of an element that is positive.

The Spirit Abhors A Vacuum

Now here in these words at the beginning of this book, which we might call 'The Book of the Scattered Fire', we have a pause, a suspense, a kind of parenthesis. The Cross with all its meaning is an accomplished fact. The work of redemption is finished. Everything has been done as to the basis of the future. And everything has been foreshadowed and foretold as to the purpose. Here it is: "Ye shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem... Judea... Samaria... unto the uttermost part of the earth" (1:8). Meeting His disciples after the Resurrection, He had given them the great commission and told them what was to be their future ministry and work to the nations, to the remotest parts of the earth. Everything foreshadowed and foretold, as to the purpose: and yet, a pause, an interlude, with a big question hanging over it: a waiting. They can do nothing, with all that. With all that, it is still negative, it is still all in suspense, it is still in this state of question. And the Holy Spirit was the answer. The Holy Spirit moved right into that 'neutral zone' and turned it into a positive; changed the whole thing from negative or neutral or question, into a mighty, positive affirmative. The rest of this book is just the story of the positive activity of the Holy Spirit.

That may seem very simple; it may not strike you as having very much in it, or being very profound. But in fact there is a very great deal in that that we ought to think about, we ought to recognize. Let me say again: wherever you come upon the Holy Spirit in the Bible, you will find He is positive. He does not believe in vacuums. The Bible opens with a vacuum - and immediately it says: "the Spirit of God" . "The Spirit of God brooded upon the face of the waters" . The Spirit of God is reacting against a vacuum. 'Without form and void empty... and the Spirit of God...' You begin your Bible with this very positive characteristic of the Holy Spirit.

And so it is all the way through. If you run through your Bible, even from memory, with this thought in mind, when you come on the Holy Spirit in any expression, whether in symbol or in action, you will find that He is always tremendously positive. You have only to recall the beginning of Ezekiel's prophecies. The living ones, the wheels, and the Spirit - and they *go!* They go, and they go straight forward; they turn neither to the right hand nor to the left. It

is the Spirit who is the *Goer*; the Spirit of the positive, who is against all that is negative, all that is neutral and all that is empty, always seeking to be on the move forward towards the great and consummate end. He is the 'Goer-Spirit', if I may coin that phrase. He is always the *executive* of the Godhead, the energy of God in the things of God. He is always in action. So this book ought to be 'The Acts of the Holy Spirit', for it is that.

A Positive Walk

Now, this law of the Spirit is the principle of the *walk* of the Christian. The walk of the Christian is supposed to be a walk in sanctification; there must be a sanctified walk. That is what it means to walk in the Spirit. The definite statement is: "Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh" (Galatians 5:16). Are you struggling, striving, fighting, not to fulfil the flesh? That is negative; you will get nowhere along that line. The way not to is to do something positive. The positive is the answer to the negative. "Walk by the Spirit, and ye shall not..." . It is a great principle of deliverance. God's way is always a positive way. We are occupied so much with the negative, striving and wrestling not to do this, to stop this and that. And we do not find that we get very far in that, do we? The provision of the Lord is: "Walk by the Spirit, and ye shall not..."

What does it mean to walk in the Spirit? Well, it means to consort with the Spirit. You say, what does that mean? It is best understood by recognizing what we do. We, by nature, consort with the flesh: we are all the time consorting with ourselves - our poor miserable selves; occupied with ourselves, talking about ourselves, praying about ourselves; keeping ourselves, our miserable selves always in front of us. When we are so continually occupied with what we are in ourselves, that is consorting with ourselves, is it not? How far do we get that way? Nowhere at all! We make no progress at all by consorting with ourselves.

And I am afraid there are some Christians who consort with the devil. It is not always easy to distinguish between ourselves and the devil, but you know he is always talking to us through ourselves. If there is something that is wrong with us, he lets us know it. If there is something that troubles us, he adds to the trouble, he accentuates. Give him a little bit of his own ground, that he himself created for himself - for he created that ground of the old fallen Adam for himself and for his own purposes, to work out his own designs - give him a little bit of that which he has made for himself, and see what he will do with it. He will make everything of it, and it will not be long before people who do that will find that they are in terrible bondage to the devil through their own selves - their own make-up and faults and weaknesses and sinfulness. And that is consorting with the devil. He comes and accuses, and you listen; he makes a suggestion, and you take it on - you almost enter into a discussion with him. You consort with him, or you consort with yourself: and that is walking after the flesh.

Don't consort with the flesh, don't consort with the devil, have no truck with them at all! Consort with the Spirit! The Spirit is the One who has come alongside: the very meaning of His Name, 'Advocate' or 'Comforter' (Greek: *parakletes*) is One who is called alongside. Consort with the One alongside. Have your communion with the Spirit. Challenge yourself, and challenge the enemy, on this: Is this really of the Spirit, does this correspond to the Word of God, is this true according to the gospel of grace? If the answer is: No, of course it is not! then repudiate it! That is consorting with the Spirit, always moving on the ground of grace, the Spirit of grace.

That is a very simple beginning, but it indicates that the Holy Spirit is positive. All that other is negative: it is pulling back, it is draining, dragging; it is all a big 'No'.

The Spirit never comes on that ground; He is against anything like that. As in the first creation He moved against the void, so in the new creation He has nothing to do with, and no interest in, vacuums, voids, or anything that is negative. Take positive ground, and you will find the Holy Spirit is with you. Forsake your negative ground in your spiritual life.

Positive Testimony

This, in the next place, is the law of service, or testimony. Notice quite simply: "Ye shall receive power, when the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be my witnesses..." . The principle of service or testimony is being positive. How many Christian lives get tied up in knots because they do not testify! They do not witness, they do not let their light shine; they are just negative. They are all the time thinking of what people will think or say, what the reactions from others will be. All sorts of considerations come in, in that way, and they just neutralize us, get us all tied up - and what poor specimens of Christians we are then!

Now note here: "They therefore that were scattered abroad upon the tribulation that arose about Stephen..." (11:19) went everywhere, testifying. There was no ordination service, no putting on of special uniform, or a badge - 'Christian Worker!' It was spontaneous, because the Holy Spirit is positive, always. And again, while this may be very simple, I know of many lives which are tied right up on this very thing: they are not positive; they are negative, or they are neutral. The Holy Spirit is therefore not moving on His own normal and natural basis in their life; they are limiting Him. Be positive, and you will find the Holy Spirit is with you, and you will get surprises. Just take notice! That is what is in this very book of the Acts: 'the Spirit said...' (10:19; 13:2), 'an angel of the Lord spake...' (8:26), and the men responded. When Philip responds to the Spirit, when Peter responds to the Spirit, oh, what tremendous things happen! - to their surprise, to their amazement! The Spirit is positive. You be positive, and you will find that He is positive, He is with you in that.

Positive Fellowship

Thirdly, this is the principle of fellowship. The fellowship of the *Spirit* is the spirit of fellowship: but, again, it is positive. Fellowship is not a passive thing: it never can be a passive thing, because all the hosts of hell are out against it. If there is one thing that hell is against, it is the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, the fellowship of the people of God. Unceasingly, by any and every means, those evil powers will seek to destroy that fellowship, because that fellowship spells their final undoing. Therefore fellowship can never be a neutral, passive kind of thing. You have got to fight for it, you have got to stand for it, you have got to be positive about this. Let some rift go on, and just see the havoc that delay over putting that right will work!

If you have the Spirit - and of course I am addressing those who are supposed to have the Spirit - you should know that, if you are out of joint with another member of the Body of Christ to which you belong, it is, as it is with a dislocation in the natural physical body: there is an ache, a perpetual ache. The Holy Spirit sets up this ache in the spiritual Body, where there is a dislocation. And you know what happens in the natural body if that is not attended to. Two things happen. One is that the longer you leave it, the more difficult it becomes to put it right; and the other is that adhesions set in - something extra. Extra things begin to come in and complicate the whole situation, so that it is no longer a straightforward thing to put that joint back. The same thing is true in the spiritual. If you let it go on, it becomes very much more difficult and more complicated. All sorts of other things - accretions and adhesions - have bound

themselves round that thing, to make it a very complicated thing now. The inflammation is there and the ache goes on.

By that inflammation and ache the Holy Spirit is giving a positive witness against this thing. But if you go on long enough, the Holy Spirit will withdraw and leave you to it, just because He is positive. He will not brook persistent negatives on these things; He just will not have it. He is going on and saying: 'All right, if you are determined to stay there, you can do so. I am going on.' And there arises a very, very serious situation. That is, of course, grim and terrible. But it all gathers round this truth that the Holy Spirit is positive on the matter of fellowship. The Spirit says: 'Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some is, but so much the more...' (Hebrews 10:25). That is not a legal thing - that you must, under legal obligation, attend all the meetings, and so on. That is your very life, that is a spiritual thing, that is the way of the Holy Spirit. You are violating the very movement of the Spirit, if you detach yourself and live an independent kind of life. That which you call 'legal', which you are seeking to throw off, is really spiritual. There is a liberty which is not the liberty of the Spirit - it is the licence of our own souls.

If the Spirit is inactive, quiescent, not doing anything, not moving; if there are marks and signs that the Spirit is not at work, that is an abnormal situation. It means that, from the standpoint of the Spirit of God, there is something wrong, something is not right. If everything were right, the Spirit would be active; He would be doing, going; there would be movement.

The Spirit will always be positive if He has His own ground. And what is His ground? It is the Cross - it is the cup. The cup and the fire, the fire and the cup, go hand-in-hand. The mighty energy of the Spirit, that positive element in the Spirit that is like fire - you know it when it comes near, or when you touch it; it is alive - that positive element of the Spirit goes hand-in-hand with the cup, which rules you out and rules me out in nature. His ground is the Cross applied deeply to us. If the Spirit has that, then He goes on, then He moves. His ground is always the Cross.

We must challenge our hearts about this. The Holy Spirit, *normally*, is always positive - I could almost say aggressive. He is never negative, He is never neutral. If He has to pause, it means that He is waiting for something; for it is not His nature to do that - He would go on. May the Lord fill us with the mighty energy of His Spirit!

Chapter Four

THE TESTING OF THE FIRE

We return again to our basic passage of Scripture:

"I came to cast fire upon the earth: and would that it were already kindled! But I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished! Think ye that I am come to give peace in the earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division: for there shall be from henceforth five in one house divided three against two, and two against three. They shall be divided, father against son, and son against father; mother against daughter, and daughter against her mother; mother in law against her daughter in law, and daughter in law against her mother in law" (Luke 12:49-53).

I confess that is one of our Lord's utterances that I least like, and that I find myself most unhappy to speak about. If anyone else but He had said it, perhaps we should have turned away. I am quite sure that if that had originated with myself, or with any of my brethren, it would have caused very great offence. But He said it. And it seems to me to be all of a piece with the beginning of that statement.

Perhaps you have noticed that this marks a very abrupt change in the whole course of the narrative. Up to the end of verse 48 you seem to have been on one thing: and then quite abruptly there is this change. I can only think that there was a pause on His part. He said that; and then He was quiet for a moment, and His mind ranged the future - the future of His own influence and effect upon the world. And then He began this part of His utterances, in a quite different, strange realm.

"I came to cast fire upon the earth..." . 'That is why I came; that sums up the meaning of My coming. Why did I come? For what did I come? What is to be the outcome and the issue? I came to cast fire upon the earth... and how am I pent up, straitened, limited! What do I want? What is it that is necessary? I have a baptism to be baptized with, and I would that it were over! I wish that were accomplished and then I should be free of this straightness and this limitation. The purpose for which I have come could be realized. Oh, that it were already accomplished - this baptism of the Passion, of the Cross!' So He thinks and so He speaks. I have said that this paragraph, from verse 49 to verse 53, seems to be all of a piece. We see here the effect of the fire, and it is very terrible. It introduces the element of judgment. There is no need to argue with anyone who knows anything about the Bible that fire in the Bible is so often the symbol of judgment - as here.

Judgment

But we need to comprehend the meaning of that word 'judgment'. We so often limit it to one of its aspects, especially the final one. We speak of 'bringing to judgment' - meaning by that, to punishment - the final effect of judgment. But judgment in the Bible is a more comprehensive word than that. It is, to begin with - and this can be clearly seen in terms of fire, or fire in terms of judgment - a trying of things, a putting them to the test. Now Scriptures will leap to your mind which bear that out. Fire tests, the fire tries, the fire finds things out, does it not? That is the first effect of fire. And that is the first meaning of judgment: to put everything to the test, to try it.

Having done that, it discriminates: that is, it divides; it shows to which category things belong, and it puts them there. Fire has that effect. It says: That is of that kind, and it belongs to that kind; it is of that category, or that realm, or that kingdom: this belongs to another. Fire finds out: it discriminates and it divides.

And then it relegates finally. It says: that has been found to belong to a certain realm; it has been designated, it has been discriminated; it belongs there, we put it there. That is the final effect of the fire.

That is the content of the word 'judgment'. We need always to keep that full meaning in mind when we use the word. We will not dwell upon its application more fully at the moment.

We are told in the Word of God that this judgment - which would come, mark you, with the coming of the Holy Spirit - the effect of Christ's release through the Cross, in the coming of the Holy Spirit was to cast fire. In other words, the effect of Christ's release would be the coming of the Spirit as the Spirit of fire; and as the Spirit of fire His presence would always be in terms of judgments in this threefold sense of the word. The Holy Spirit's presence is like this and it has this effect. Let us now look into the Word to see the realm in which that operates.

Human Relationships

Here in chapter 12 of Luke's Gospel we have it operating in one realm. We read those terrible words: "Think ye that I am come to give peace in the earth? I tell you, Nay, but rather division." The word in the old Authorized Version is "a sword" . Division! It sounds terrible, and we are on very delicate ground, we have to be very careful. But He goes on to explain what He means by division: "There shall be from henceforth five in one household divided, three against two, and two against three." And then He gives examples of division in the family. Here the fire is at work in the realm of human relationships.

Now let me say here at once, in parenthesis, and with considerable emphasis, that this has nothing to do with outward divisions within the Church, divisions amongst those who are in Christ. That is not what the Lord is speaking about or pointing to. He is thinking in a totally different realm, in the spiritual realm. This division takes place entirely upon a spiritual basis. The divisions as we have them in the first letter to the Corinthians are because of other things amongst believers that are not spiritual, but this is a spiritual division, essentially and basically.

Perhaps the classic illustration or example of this is the one that we have in the early part of the Old Testament, in the case of the Levites. You will call to mind how, when they had reached the wilderness, Moses was called up into the Mount. He was there so long that the people came - I think deliberately placed by God - under a very severe test, as to where their hearts really were: whether they were after their own interests or after God's, their own ends or His; whether their hearts were in this matter with the Lord, or whether their hearts were set upon their own gratification and pleasure. They were put to the severe test of that probationary period of the forty days and forty nights in which Moses was in the Mount, and they broke down under the test. When Moses came down, hearing the noise in the camp, you remember what had happened - the calf and the dancing. "These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt."

Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and cried: 'Who is on the Lord's side?' "Whoso is on the Lord's side, let him come unto me." 'And all the sons of Levi went over to him. And he said, Gird every man his sword upon his side, and go in and out and slay every man his brother, every man his friend.' The sword, the

fiery sword, has come into the realm of human relationships. It is finding out where the heart is, testing the heart; it is discriminating between motives, "the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12); and it is putting these people in the category to which they belong. Here are the Levites, who have been put to the test and have come through triumphantly, and for evermore they stand as representing the full, pure thought of God concerning His people. The point is that this work of judgment, of the fire, of the sword, came into the realm of human relationships, to find out the motives of the heart.

You can take that into Luke 12. That is just what it means. The divisions, even within the family, the home, the household, will be made by the Holy Spirit on this matter of the relationship of the heart. We can see, as we read the story of Israel in the wilderness, that the heart of that nation, that generation, as the Psalmist said, "was not steadfast with God" (Psalm 78:8b). In their heart they lusted after Egypt - the fleshpots of Egypt. Their heart was back there, even while they were in the wilderness; and that generation never entered the Land, because its heart was not with the Lord. It is a matter of inward division, a division in the heart.

Now the Holy Spirit is always a divider in that way; it is a work of the Holy Spirit to do that. In a sense - not in the wrong sense, and be careful how you take me up - in a sense the Holy Spirit is the cause of divisions. There is a realm in which He is the divider.

Let us take our Bible and go right back to the beginning. The Spirit of God brooded upon the chaos, the darkness, the void. What was the first thing done by and through the Holy Spirit? Dividing between things: a process of division between light and darkness. "And God divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness Night" (Genesis 1:4-5). And then God divided between the heaven and the earth. He divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament" (1:7). They had got too near; one was right down on top of the other, so that you could not discern or discriminate between the clouds of the heavens and the waters upon the earth. He put the firmament - an expanse, a space - between: and He called it Heaven. In the same way He separated the dry land from the waters, and He "called the dry land earth; and... the waters called He seas" (1:10). And He "saw that it was good."

Now there are Old Testament things which have, as we know, a New Testament meaning. These are found in their counterpart in the new creation. And when you come to the book of the Acts, the book of the Holy Spirit at work in relation to the new creation, you find all the way through that divisions are taking place as a result of the Holy Spirit's activity. Indeed, you may say that that is the characteristic of the Spirit's work right through the New Testament: a dividing between light and darkness; a judging and a pronouncing. 'That is darkness - that is one realm, and that is light - that is another realm; and these two can never, in the right and proper way, obtain together, they cannot co-exist. They are separated and belong to two entirely different categories.' The Spirit of God has done that.

Interpret that spiritually, and you see what it means. What a tremendous amount there is bound up with that in spiritual life! It works out in this way, that anyone - and this is the test - who really has the Spirit is very sensitive to light and very sensitive to darkness. They know quite well about the big division that God has made; and, when they touch anything that belongs to the darkness realm, they feel the darkness in their own spirit, they know they have touched darkness, they

know they have come into another realm. That is a work of the Spirit, and a very important work indeed.

On the other hand, anyone who has the Spirit will be equally sensitive to light. When there is true light - we will define that in a moment - the spiritual man or woman at once leaps to it. Why? Because this kind of light is not cold light: it is the light of fire - it is living light, that has energy in it. You can have light, but it is cold. You can have imitation fire, but it is cold - like those things that you switch on, with the imitation of glowing coal, but it does not make any difference, other than psychologically! You see the thing, and perhaps you imagine something, but really it is all an illusion. And you can have that kind of light, but it is imitation, it is artificial, it is false. You can switch it on and equally quickly switch it off. But that is not the light of fire, which is energetic. And the light of the Spirit, the light of God, the light of Christ, is always living, energetic light. When you and I who have the Spirit come into touch with light, it is not that we become mentally and intellectually interested, fascinated, charmed or captivated. It is that something within us leaps up and responds, because we have met *energy*.

These are marks of the Spirit, judging which is which and what is what, what belongs to this realm and what belongs to that; and these things are set apart: so that it is something quite abnormal if darkness comes into the day or light into the night. It is not the ordinary course of things at all. Do you see the point? You can have those differences of kingdom or realm within your own family, your own household, and there can be no fellowship at all because there is the division which is made by the Holy Spirit Himself. Many can confirm and testify to this from their own experience, and some are suffering because of it. But the point is that is how it will be if the Holy Spirit comes in, and the Lord Jesus was faithful and honest enough to let it be known that that is how it would be. You cannot avoid it, you cannot get over it, you cannot bridge it. It is painful, but it is a mark that the Spirit has done something. Would that we, as the Lord's people, might be more and more sensitive to those different realms which are put apart by the Spirit of God! It is a mark of growth in the light of the Spirit to become more and more sensitive to what belongs here and what belongs there.

You may remember that on two different occasions Paul used that phrase: "the things which differ" (Romans 2:18; Philippians 1:10); and he said it to believers. He would have them know, as Christians, the things that differ. That was the true kind of division that ought to have existed at Corinth. The other was a false and a wrong division; but this was where things had got mixed up. Day and night had been all mixed up together; things which belonged to the night were present among the "sons of the day" (1 Thessalonians 5:5), and they were not sensitive to them. And so the first letter to the Corinthians has so much about the Holy Spirit - the real effect and work of the Holy Spirit. We must recognize that the life of the Spirit is a life of spiritual dividing; the course of the Spirit-governed life is that of discerning, being sensitive to the things that differ.

Christian Work

The next application of this is to the whole matter of Christian work. Paul speaks about this in his first letter to the Corinthians, chapter 3.

"According to the grace of God which was given unto me, as a wise master-builder I laid a foundation; and another buildeth thereon. But let each man take heed how he buildeth thereon. For other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid which is Jesus Christ. But if any man buildeth on the foundation gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay, stubble; each man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it is revealed in fire; and the fire

itself shall prove each man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work shall abide which he built thereon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as through fire" (1 Corinthians 3: 10-15).

And we place alongside of that a passage from the letter to the Hebrews:

"Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying. Yet once more will I make to tremble not the earth only, but also the heaven. And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that have been made, that those things which are not shaken may remain. Wherefore, receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken..." (Hebrews 12:26-28).

Here we come into the realm of values in life - in life's work; and the discrimination is brought in by the fire. The fire tries "of what sort it is" . And remember, this is addressed to Christians. It is not addressed to those who are doing their work, following their profession, as people of the world. This is addressed to Christians, and it is speaking about *Christian* work: Christ as the foundation, and the work that you do on that foundation. Paul is saying about Christian work that there is one realm which will abide the fire, and there is another realm - in Christian work - which will go up in smoke: it will be proved that all that was for nothing: the worker will just get into heaven, and that is all! Saved - yes - "so as through fire" .

Here is a division which the Holy Spirit makes in the realm of Christian work. If we want to sum it all up, really get to the heart of it, it just amounts to this: Only that which is done by and through the Holy Spirit Himself will remain, will abide the test, will be "found unto praise and glory and honour at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:7). There can be a tremendous amount of activity and energy, of work and works, engaged in by Christians in relation to Christ, at least in intention, which comes into this category of being consigned to the fire, disappearing in the flames, and leaving the worker at the end with nothing for all his toil.

This is what was happening in the book of the Acts. Look through this book and see the discrimination that is being made. Yes, a discrimination is truly being made. Oh, how those Judaisers laboured! How they travelled and compassed sea and land! It must have cost them quite a lot to make those long journeys. Their movements were far and wide. You are forced to conclude, not only that they were men who meant business, but that, so far as they understood themselves and their position, they were what we would call sincere men. I do not see very much difference between these Judaisers who pursued Paul wherever he went and gave their very lives to this sort of thing, and Saul of Tarsus as he was. It is just what he was doing; he was one of them.

"I verily thought..." - 'I truly thought'; if you like, 'I honestly thought' - "with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth" (Acts 26:9). That is the utterance of an honest man, of a sincere man. 'I verily thought that I ought... I considered this thing: this was no mere impulse, this was no mere fanaticism. I thought' - Paul was a man who thought - 'I thought that I ought... It was a matter of conscientious conviction with me that this was what I ought to do, that it was the right thing to do, that I was called upon to do it. It was a matter of conscience with me. I verily thought within myself that I ought...'

Yes, but how possible it is to be as utterly sincere as that and as utterly mistaken! The Judaisers were like that. But their work did not last. Here is the work of the Spirit going on: and it has gone on, and it is still going on. It has stood all the testing and all the trying out, and it survives the fire - the fire of judgment, the fire of testing. It has proved itself to be the work of the Spirit. It shows the supreme importance, as the key to the whole of this thing - not of being sincere, not of being enthusiastic, not of acting on the basis of conscientious conviction - but of being governed by the Holy Spirit. That is the important thing! It is only that that lasts.

This all comes into the realm of Christian work. Perhaps you may have felt a little catch just now about the Judaisers: but you have got to concede them quite a lot, you know. These Judaisers were not anti-Christian. What they really wanted was Jewish Christianity - a Christianity with a Jewish complex. They are prepared to have Christianity, if only Christianity will conform to the Jewish order, to the Jewish pattern. I am not going to argue that out now, but I could bring forward much evidence to show that that is so. Paul shows by his letter to the Galatians that that is not the work of the Spirit. It is something quite different.

Christian Testimony

The next thought here takes us into the realm of Christian testimony: the fire at work in the realm of Christian testimony. We turn to a very well-known passage:

"But thanks be unto God, which always leadeth us in triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest through us the savour of his knowledge in every place. For we are a sweet savour of Christ unto God, in them that are being saved, and in them that are perishing; to the one a savour from death unto death; to the other a savour from life unto life" (2 Corinthians 2:14-16).

There is the dividing effect of the fire. You know the picture, the background. Paul is thinking in terms of the Roman procession, the triumphant General leading his prisoners in his train, holding celebrations of his victory from place to place. At every such place the altar was erected, the fire was lit, the flame leapt up, and the incense filled the air, and that had a double effect. There were some who were in the way of perishing, and that was the place where they would perish; they will be sacrificed there. There are others who are not in the way of perishing: they will pass that fire and go on; they will be saved. The background, you see, is very vivid. The fire is discriminating and determining here.

But Paul says that this is the dual effect of the Holy Spirit in our life and ministry, as we go from place to place. Something happens everywhere and every time. One or both of two things happens in every place. On the one hand, those who refuse the light, who persist in fighting against the victorious Lord, who resist the Holy Ghost, are brought to condemnation: they are put into the category to which they belong - condemned. On the other hand, those who believe, those who accept are, by the same Holy Spirit, brought into liberty. They pass the testing fire and go on in life. "To the one a savour from death unto death; to the other a savour from life unto life."

Now the point is this: Paul is saying that this is the effect of the Holy Spirit in our ministry and in our testimony. In other words, the Holy Spirit never leaves things as they were. The presence of the Holy Spirit always brings about some kind of a crisis and verdict. If the Holy Spirit is present, speaking, we cannot be the same afterward as before. Some thing has happened. We are either more hardened or more softened; we are either more condemned or more saved. In the presence of the Holy Spirit something happens; the fire does this work of judging.

This is what the Lord Jesus meant when He spoke of 'casting fire upon the earth'. What will the fire do? Well, it will make this division, it will bring this judgment; it will determine things and people and their destiny. We know how true that is in history. That is the effect of the Holy Spirit. But what I want to underline in that particular connection is this: If you and I are really men and women who are governed by the Spirit and filled with the Spirit, the effect of our presence and our passing this way will be to leave things otherwise than they were before. There will be eternal verdicts reached by our having gone this way. That is, of course, the object of ministry. 'Thanks be unto God who leads me on from place to place to celebrate His victory.' The effect is either the one thing or the other; things are not afterward as they were before. Holy Spirit ministry must be like that: it must produce something, it must effect something, it must make a difference. And in fact it does! It does that!

The Fire Discriminating

The fire is cast upon the earth, and, as we go through this book of the Acts, we can see all these things happening: they are happening all the time. The fire is doing it: the fire is finding out, is testing, is discriminating, is relegating. The end of the story is that you have got two realms set apart, and shown for what they are and what they belong to.

There is very much more, of course, that could be said on this matter of spiritual discrimination; the things that belong to the different categories, that essential spiritual difference. But I think we can sum everything up by saying this: that if we are really governed by the Holy Spirit, we shall all belong to one category. That is the point. There will not be so many different categories, or realms, in which we live: there will not be two - there will only be one. The Holy Spirit seeks to secure one category of people, and that is a people wholly governed and led by Himself. And if you have to say: 'I fundamentally disagree with you' on anything, then one of us is not in the Spirit. It is up to us to find out where the wrong is, because the Holy Spirit is not fundamentally of two different minds. He never can be that. To be really in the Spirit means, I repeat, to be of one category, of one kind.

And so the Apostle wrote so much to these churches about this oneness of mind, of heart, of spirit, this 'all speaking the one thing' (1 Corinthians 1:10). He said it again, he asked for it again, he was pleading for it (cf. Philippians 1:27; 4:2); therefore it is possible. The solution to all those problems and difficulties is life in the Spirit. And that, of course is based on the Cross, where we find an infinite capacity for letting go to the Lord. If we forget all the rest, let us remember that.